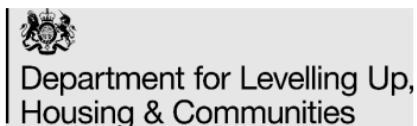


Appendix B External Assurance on the Supporting Families Programme



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07th March 2022

Supporting Families payment by results assurance visit and update on performance

Dear Paul,

I am writing to let you know the outcome of our recent check of your Supporting Families (SF) programme Payment by Results claims for April – June 2021, which took place on 1st February 2022. On behalf of my team, I want to pass on my thanks to you and to your team for hosting the visit and preparing such a full and interesting day.

Claims Validation ('Assurance' process)

As you may know, the SF programme includes a Payment by Results element of funding. Your authority receives £800 for each family on the programme where a successful outcome has been achieved.

The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) conducts a validation process to ensure that your claims are compliant with the terms set out in the programme guidance. This validation process involves checking evidence of eligibility, successful outcomes, and whole family working.

During these visits, the national team also review how local authorities use their case management and data systems to track, monitor and evidence outcomes. My team are also interested to hear about the strategic context for the delivery of whole family working, and any important new or ongoing initiatives.

Your team presented Wirral's new strategies around the Community Matters Partnerships and how the authority as a whole and partnership were signing up to support families across the Wirral. We heard about the prevention framework "Breaking the Cycle," which is focused on integrating and transforming the public perception of services. Breaking the Cycle creates a more joined-up, person-centred approach to local delivery, with a commitment to making long-term and sustainable changes to your local systems. We saw the "Family Toolbox" website which provides online tools and resources from a network of wider organisations and partners for families, which they have said helps them to thrive and is enabling you to understand the services they want and need.

Overall outcome of the assurance visit

Ahead of our visit a sample (10) of your Payment by Results claims from quarter 1, April – June 2021 was selected and reviewed by my team on a recent visit. Having reviewed the evidence provided by your team, **we concluded there were no invalid claims.**

The cases we reviewed did demonstrate a need to improve the accuracy of recording a families' needs and evidencing outcomes. Currently family need is accurately recorded at the initial point of intervention but not when new needs emerge throughout any work with the family. Capturing these additional needs is essential to ensuring the accuracy of your case records and datasets. We have also recommended to your team they ensure a family is aware of the identity of the lead professional as, from reviewing your cases and talking to your keyworkers, this was not always clear. This is part of the programme conditions, and it benefits a family to have one clear point of contact.

Data

As part of the programme sign-up conditions, you agreed to have sufficient development and analytical resource to improve your systems to deliver as a minimum the following milestones of data maturity:

- Data governance at a strategic level is established overseeing data sharing and use across all partners to support families. To receive regular person level data feeds from internal Local Authority sources, such as education data.
- Through discussions with police colleagues, work towards sharing datasets (including, where possible, offending data relating to different age ranges, and domestic abuse data) to enable joint analytics to support families. Partners will work together to identify any barriers to data sharing and overcome these barriers, through sharing good practice.
- Working towards or establish data sharing agreements for person level data on health, housing (rent arrears and antisocial behaviour), and homelessness.
- All individual outcomes are embedded in the case management system from notification / assessment to closure.

It was good to see data sharing across your authority and that, through the Breaking the Cycle initiative, there has been additional partnership agreements. This was particularly evident with the work happening with housing and homelessness teams, with practitioners really joining data and strategy together. Whilst your strategic partnership board is helping with your data sharing, we would advise that you have a specific governance board or group to focus on data sharing to make further progress.

Regarding your datasets, it was good to see you using police data, particularly for incidents of domestic abuse. Your Community Matters partnership has commissioned community organisations to deliver an early help service to families across Wirral who need it most. Joint commissioning by these partners aids the drawing together of data for your Power BI reports. We are interested to see how these data sets will progress to produce predictive analytics as the next steps in your data journey.

We would strongly recommend your team prioritise embedding individual needs and outcomes into the case management systems, from notification through to case closure. This will streamline the tracking and monitoring of cases in a less manual way than the current process, which involves your analysts reading case files. The assurance of the outcomes could then form part of the case closure process which would provide more resources for analysis.

Keyworkers

It was clear that keyworkers felt they had been part of the change process in Wirral. They are now seen as part of the community rather than a service within the programme. This has enabled them to reach families they would not normally work with, build better relationships, and change the culture as to how services were perceived by the whole family.

Work with partners

We were interested in your use of partner commissioning model to support the Early Help offer in Wirral. It was clear this was welcomed by your partners who were pleased to be able to add working with the whole family to their offer due to the additional funding. They demonstrated the same passion and enthusiasm for the vision you have. We would appreciate it if you would share with the national team, your insights into progress and impact of the Community Partnership approach.

Performance on family outcomes

Wirral had a target to achieve successful outcomes with 524 families in this financial year and to date have done so with 452 families meeting 86% of the target so far. We are confident that, as in previous years, you will meet 100%.

Next Steps

It is clear Wirral has been on an improvement journey, first focusing on safeguarding and social care, and when those changes were fully embedded, building the community partnership approach and developing an early help offer. Your staff reported they are still in the relatively early days in the transformation of services in Wirral but were clearly committed and an inspirational team ready to lead the work.

You have a large amount of data on families on Wirral from a variety of sources. For this to be useful to you we recommend that there is a greater focus on accuracy of all needs and corresponding outcomes. This will help you to see what services people need, in what location, what interventions work, where workforce development is needed and will inform commissioning and service development.

We would be keen to hear more on your family toolbox website once this is established further and publicised as a new method for self-referrals.

We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Yours sincerely,



Kirby Swales
Deputy Director, Supporting Families